

MARRIAGE AMONG /KUNG BUSHMEN

185 polygyny affords women—that none remain long without the support of a husband.
595 They just said they did not want to be second wives, nor did they want their husbands to take second wives, and protests and quarrels attended a husband's proposal to do so.

Marriage by capture

583 Marriage by capture was spoken of fairly frequently by the /Kung in conversation. Elizabeth Marshall Thomas and I questioned a number of informants about it and we are convinced that wives are not actually acquired by this means at present. Perhaps they were in the past. The /Kung are a present-oriented people who make no concerted or consistent effort to retain their history and teach it to their children, and we obtained no significant data on their past customs. Nowadays the idea of capturing wives appears to be enjoyed by the men as a fantasy. The remarks of one /Gaishay illustrate what I mean. He weighs, at a good guess, about ninety pounds and looks like a miniature Mephistopheles. With a gleam he told me that if he wanted to take another wife he would go to her werf, seize her, throw her over his shoulder and run off with her. That is the way Bushmen do, he said, and he wished I could see him do so. I also wished that I could.

Arrangements for marriage

584 First marriages are arranged by the parents of the bride and groom, and second marriages also if the couple are still young. Adults, when both have been married before, may contract subsequent marriages themselves.

[611] Although there is a slight paternal emphasis in this society which recognizes
[593] bilateral descent, and the father names all his children, his authority is not clearly dominant over the mother's in the choice of a mate for their child. By and large, it appears that the father and mother talk things over and come to agreement. If they do not agree, it appears that the strength of personality of one or the other, the opinions of relatives, and various circumstances have weight in the decision.

Either the parents of the boy or those of the girl may take the initiative and go to the other parents with the proposal. A go-between is not required, though it is possible that a friend will sometimes act as such. The parents visit and talk, and, if they all agree, the arrangement is thereby settled upon. They normally give each other gifts in honour of the occasion.

Property does not enter much into the consideration of the parents in arranging marriages for their children. No property settlement is made, no bride-price paid, no dowry given, though at the time of the wedding a few gifts are exchanged.

423 Food and water must, one imagines, weigh in the parents' thinking when a marriage is being arranged, and may sometimes be a determining factor. However, there is a considerable amount of equalization in these supplies. Veldkos¹ and water-holes are not owned by individuals but by headmen for their bands, in a way I shall describe in a paper on bands. In the Nyae Nyae region each band has access to a supply, else the people would be dead or somewhere else, and things balance out in

¹ *Veldkos* (field food) is an Afrikaans word used to refer to any kind of wild plant material which people gather to eat. Edible fruits, seeds, roots, tubers, leaves, all are included.

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tion is not necessary. 'A wife can get tired of loving her husband', we were told, 586
'and just tell him to go away.'

We learned about seven divorces only in our sample. The middle-aged Khuan//a, the mother of the bridegroom, /Gunda, had left her first husband to marry her lover. Another middle-aged woman left her husband because he was on the point of marrying a second wife. Jealousy between the two young wives at Gam, lamented in song by the young husband, had been the cause of the third. The whims of young girls caused others. A girl named /Ungka, married to a considerably older man, hated him though he was good to her and gave her oil and ornaments for her hair. She cut off her hair and threw it, ornaments and all, into the fire. She thrust her head into the ashes and made herself filthy. In another instance, the girl took offence the first night of her marriage and left her young husband next day, to his painful chagrin. The lenient and patient parents of these girls arranged other marriages. Di/ai, the mother of the bride /Nai, and now the wife of Gao, the medicine man in Band 1, was divorced from two former husbands in her youth. And /U, her sister, while still very young had been persuaded by ≠Toma to leave her tall young husband from Gam and to marry him. [587]

Our data on frequency of divorce are too scant to be significant. We have merely the impression that there seems to be some tendency for couples to separate while they are young and in whatever adolescent turbulence the /Kung experience, but that, on the other hand, there is considerable stability in marriage once a compatible mate is found. At least, no divorces occurred between 1952 and 1959 in eight of the bands of our sample. We lack data on the others.

Young children of divorced parents remain with the mother. As they grow to adolescence the girls usually stay with their mothers, the boys may go to their fathers or stay with their mothers or spend some time with each.

Although the /Kung do not consider divorce reprehensible, they deplore it. Divorce is untoward, disruptive; it can cause trouble. Anything other than peace and harmony in human relations makes the /Kung uneasy. [181]

Extra-marital sexual relations

Murdock points out that 'Our own culture includes a blanket taboo against fornication, an over-all prohibition of all sexual intercourse outside of the marital relationship.'¹ He goes on to say that our society is highly aberrant in this and that 'from available evidence [however] it seems unlikely that a general prohibition of sex relations outside of marriage occurs in as many as five per cent of the peoples of the earth'.² [71]

/Kung society has an over-all prohibition against any sexual relations outside of marriage with one exception. It makes no requirements such as sexual hospitality or *jus primae noctis*. It makes no provision for sexual access to certain categories of kin or affines outside of marriage, such as BrWi. Premarital unchastity, unchastity of widows, and prostitution are not among their social conventions. But /kamheri, though not required, is either fully permitted or tolerated as not a very bad thing; I never reached certainty as to which of these attitudes the society adopted. [836]

/Kamheri means that two men may agree to exchange wives temporarily, provided

¹ Murdock, op. cit., p. 263.

² Ibid., p. 264.

[21 cont.]

648 The Bushmen as a whole are despised by the other peoples, but in individual cases they are feared, and not least by the Whites. The Bushmen are familiar with this attitude and conduct themselves accordingly.

797 The Bushmen accept a foreign point of view only with
177 great difficulty, if at all. The mission, accordingly, can show
157 no noteworthy success among them. On the other hand, they usually grasp the intentions of others more quickly than the ordinarily more superficial Blacks. Consequently, they give brief and precise answers to the questions put to them. When asked questions that they do not want to answer, they remain silent. At the same time, in dealings with them one should note that they tire very quickly when they have to do mental work, and then they will not answer further questions, not because they do not want to, but because they are too tired.

181 The Bushmen are not generous. Nevertheless, allow-
[574] ing a stranger to partake of a meal, as well as giving him some
609 of the available water, is wholly matter-of-course with them.

[43] They very rarely, however, give any of their personal belongings, weapons, ornaments, hides, and so forth, as presents. If they themselves receive presents, they are obviously delighted.

181 It is true that they do not express their gratitude with words,
577 [22] but anyone who does the Bushmen a kindness may be sure that they will manifest their gratitude by deeds to the point of self-sacrifice.

To help a fellow human being who is in trouble is a moral obligation. There is a report of a prospector who lost his
[648] way in the bush forest and was then saved by the Bushmen, with whom he could not even converse; they took care of him for several days and finally put him on the right path.

Agreements and promises are kept unconditionally by the Bushman, although it is true that he usually arrives a little too late. Once, when an ox from the ox-cart of the Catholic mission had to be left behind on the way to the Okovanggo, it was put in the care of the Bushmen and they were to deliver it at the time of the next full moon. The people kept their word, and the ox was delivered, well-fed, at the specified time.

As a comrade, the Bushman is reliable and faithful (1).

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648 1. A European had once illegally

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[22 cont.]

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appropriated a number of little trees and planted them in front of his house. On one occasion when he was in town with his Bushmen, the original owner of the trees declared that in the afternoon he was going to see about it. The Bushmen heard this and disappeared. When the two Whites came to the farm, the little trees had disappeared. The Bushmen had run ahead and had hurriedly removed them on their own initiative.

181 The Bushmen are at all times courageous and steadfast people, characteristics which, indeed, their very way of life would produce.

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[864] The Bushmen strictly avoid talking about sexual matters in the presence of women and children. Just as in general they are a people without imagination, they do not have any form of the more subtle erotic phantasies.

The endless obscene stories that one hears from the Blacks as soon as he has gained their confidence are unknown among the Bushmen.

[535] The sexual element is absent in their religious celebrations, but it finds expression in many of their dances, which imitate the love play of animals.

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On the whole, their sense of modesty cannot be denied, even though, naturally, they do not have such decent forms of conduct as the genteel Bantu, among whom it is regarded as extremely improper to look at the breasts of the women. The [516] girls and women never sit in the typical squatting position, but rather sit on the ground with the legs crossed.

[576]

Although the life of the Bushmen within the encampment is openly in view, those principles that we regard as natural tact are nonetheless observed.

[514]

The Bushman performs his necessities at all times out of sight of the others, and love scenes are never enacted in public.

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124 It is naturally very difficult to learn anything more precise concerning the more intimate details of sexual life

!Kung

[23 cont.]

- 105 and in the beyond by his traditional conceptions, and the preserva-
 182 tion of this adaptation, in the spiritual as well as in the material
 realm, is achieved by means of a strict selection of all the cul-
 tural goods offered from the outside. This selection is consciously
 carried out. Put briefly: the Bushmen have hitherto refused higher
 [177] economic forms not because they do not possess the ability to
 handle them, but because they did not want to adopt them. If the
 material preconditions collapse, then they adopt, step by step or
 all at once, totally different ways of life, as is shown by their
 Bantuization in Ovamboland and probably also by the formation
 of the Hottentot people through the adoption of livestock raising
 on the part of a number of Bushman tribes. Their average intelli-
 [153] gence is no less than that of any other race. Every Bushman knows
 [184] the entire spiritual heritage of his tribe.

Of the same Bushmen, F. Schinz (2) says:

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2. F. Schinz, Deutsch-Südwestafrika,
 Leipzig, 1891.

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- "The Bushman is always faithful to his master and will
 follow him anywhere without pay; one need not worry about
 leaving him alone at the wagon and will rarely have to reprimand
 him for dishonesty. All travelers and hunters unanimously praise
 [593] the great affection that exists between parents and children, which
 goes so far that the father or mother will sacrifice themselves in
 order to save their child. I was told [24] by the hunter L. that at
 the Okovango he once witnessed a scene in which a young Bush-
 man, who was one of the members of the hunting expedition, was
 in danger of being trampled to death by an angry elephant that
 stormed toward him. At the last moment when his paralyzed com-
 panions had already given the boy up for lost, his father sprang
 forth and flung his throwing club at the forehead of the enormous
 animal. The elephant now turned against his new attacker and
 furiously crushed him under his feet, giving the son the opportunity
 to flee."

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My observations are fully in accord with those of Dornan (1)

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1. Dornan, Pygmies and Bushmen of the
 Kalahari, London, 1925.

[24 cont.]

181 He states:

181 "It has been asserted that the Bushmen have no feeling for
593 one another. I have frequently heard it said that the mothers are cruel to their children and occasionally kill them when their burden becomes too great. As far as I can see, this is untrue. I have frequently seen Bushman mothers kiss their little ones, exactly as European women do, and when the children are ill, they go to all kinds of trouble. The fathers, it is true, are frequently gruff and rough, but never brutal to their children. The girls are usually seen in company with their mothers, the boys with the men. Between mother and daughter there is an intimate relationship of trust. It has also been asserted that Bushmen are ungrateful; this is also quite untrue. They show their feeling of gratitude neither to one another nor to the Whites, but anyone who gains their trust through kindness can tell that they are indeed grateful. They show their gratitude not by words but by deeds. If someone is in need or in distress and a Bushman friend is in the vicinity, the latter will stay by him to the bitter end."

[124] The !Kung Bushman in particular is much more a rational than a sentimental person. The extraordinary difficulty that he encounters in obtaining his livelihood makes him extremely independent in his thinking. It was surprising to see the sureness with which not only men but women, too, were able to act as interpreters. Whereas among the Bantu it is difficult to keep the conversation on the subject, the Bushman always sticks to the point. Even the tribal traditions, insofar as superstitious conceptions are concerned, are not safe from the skepticism of the individual. For instance, I once asked a number of Bushmen whether they hunt lions. They [775] answered in the negative, and when I said that this was probably [771] because the lions harbored the spirits of eminent deceased Bushmen, they laughed and said that this was just a tale of the Hei//om Bushmen and some Bushman doctors who had learned this from them. Other men of the same tribe, on the other hand, were firmly convinced that the spirits of great Bushmen doctors reside in the lions.

181 There are also many stories about bush spirits, especially in
771 the Otjimpolo Veld. My informants repeatedly observed, however, that they did not know whether there was any truth in them, because
They had never seen any.

[24 cont.]

000 they had never seen any. A certain dry humor spiced their conversation. I once said to a Bushman: "If you tell me this, you will get whatever you want." He answered: "Good, I shall speak and you will give me your automobile." Their imagination is very poor; in this respect they are much too accurate as observers of nature. Once a young Bushman woman with two children came to me and wanted to buy some sugar. I said to her: "I won't sell you anything, but you will get the sugar if you tell me some children's stories, for example, about animals." After some hesitation she began the story of Arri, the guinea hen. It was no fairy tale, but a detailed account concerning this important food bird. She even imitated the calls of the guinea hen, "for example, when someone comes and there is danger, then they say, 'gannana he gannana he,' but when they are alone and enjoying themselves, then they go 'gi gi gi.'" The children had to imitate this until they were able to mimic the sound accurately. Then it was the turn of the sand hen, which says, "gi ganna gi ganna"; then the ostrich, which goes, "hmm, hmm, hmm"; then the gum bird [Harzvogel], which says, "hai-dschi, hai-dschi," and the owl, "mhm, m."

3. Posture, Movement, Stamina

516 As a result of his marked lordosis, the Bushman never assumes a posture that would conform to our military ideal; he almost always stands with his stomach somewhat protruding.

481 The way the Bushmen run is very peculiar and would justify detailed study. [25] The run is really a continuous fast walk, in which the legs are kicked forward, but the lower thighs are never brought back high, as is the case with our runners. The body is held as straight as possible, and the head up, not forward (1).

[113] 1. E. v. Eickstedt (Rassenkunde und Rassengeschichte der Menschheit [Ethnology and History of Mankind], p. 556) states: "The foot is put in a peculiar transverse position, which makes the track in the sand easily

THE KIN TERMINOLOGY SYSTEM OF THE /KUNG BUSHMEN 23

method had been established. The /Kō and /Gikwe have not incorporated the belief into their terminological systems except in a very limited way. The /Kung, however, have done so, and appear to have adapted it as logically as possible to the generational method. They apply it only to somewhat distant relationships, namely, grandparents, grandchildren, collaterals, secondary affines, and name-relatives. They do not apply it in the close biological relationships of parent, offspring or sibling or in the primary affinal relationships. Consistency is maintained by the rule that a child must not be named for a parent.

We think that the term /gu/na came into the system with the homonymous method and that perhaps it used originally to be applied only to the person for whom ego is named. It is not strictly a kinship term, being composed of translatable words, 'big or old name'. We think it may have been superimposed upon *tun/ga* (which probably comes from the same root as *tūn*). *Tun/ga* may originally have been applied to grandfather, man-speaking as well as woman-speaking, and later /gu/na may have become associated with grandfather because so many men are named for their grandfathers. If this is so, an anomalous situation remains unresolved. *Tun/ga* is applied to consanguineous kin and affines and allows joking, woman-speaking. Man-speaking, it is applied only to affines and prohibits joking. If it was originally the term for grandfather, man-speaking, we reason that it should allow joking, and we cannot explain this anomaly.

Whatever may be the answer to these questions, the /Kung have put to good use the belief that persons who have the same name partake of each other's entities. This belief has given them the name-relationship.

It is our impression that the practice of applying terms to name-relatives has appealed to the /Kung and that they have developed it to the full. The /Kung apply a kinship term to every /Kung they meet or almost everyone. /Qui was the only informant who worked with us on this subject who had ever met a /Kung Bushman for whom he had no kinship term. He had met four who came from a distance and whose names were not among those commonly used in the Nyae Nyae region. Ta//ne was one of the names. Gao, who was present, told /Qui that he had a *tsu* named Ta//ne, and he and /Qui nodded together in agreement that they would find a way for /Qui to give Ta//ne a term should they meet again. We know two men who used the term /go for each other because each of them had a brother named Dam. The system seems to have been flexible and expansive in the application of terms to name-relatives.

The /Kung are small of stature and non-aggressive. They are timid and apprehensive of strangers. Their word for stranger is *ju dole*. *Ju* means person, *dole* means strange or harmful—one word for both concepts, in the /Kung language, as though they were a single concept. The /Kung have no social organization larger than the band of kin who live together but they have utilized the name-relationship to supply the cohesive factor which is supplied in other societies by various social structures. When a /Kung meets a stranger and finds that he has the same name as one of his kin and bestows a kinship term upon him, he is reassured and feels a sense of belonging.

Gao, the brother of /U, went on an errand for us to Khadum. Khadum is about 115 miles north of Gautscha and about 40 miles north of Cho/ana where we were staying at the time. He had never been to Khadum before, and the /Kung Bushmen who lived

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Bushmen who try to escape. But to escape from any master is⁴⁶⁶ by no means impossible; Bushmen are not locked up at night⁵⁶⁶ or guarded during the day. Even the chain gangs of Bushmen that you may see in European settlements (Bushmen living^[687] near the farms are put in jail occasionally for killing giraffes or stealing cattle) are always straggling down a road with a defenseless guard trailing far behind, and we often wondered why Bushmen were so docile, so easy to exploit, allowing themselves to be badly treated and taken away from their homes. Some people, like Tami, have no choice because they have forgotten the fine skills required to live in the veld and would die there. Some young Bushmen find the promise of European clothing and customs too alluring to resist and are willing to give up their own ways and customs for a shirt or a ragged dress. Perhaps others welcome the promise of food every day, even though they find that on the farms they are poorer than ever, having little enough food, and when their leather clothes fall into rags they cannot hunt to get new ones. Perhaps, too, they are surprised to find their Bantu or European masters not always as dangerous as they feared.

But these things are not true of everyone. Many servants long for their homes; many veld Bushmen hide from Europeans for fear they will be taken away, for they know that a European does not have to force them to come with him, only to persuade them, and since they are afraid of him they hear themselves agreeing to go, and, shortly after, find themselves working on his farm, angry with themselves and filled with remorse.

We learned two reasons for the submissiveness of Bush-¹⁸¹ men. One reason is that it is not in their nature to fight, not in their experience to deal with people other than themselves. They would much rather run, hide, and wait until a menace has passed than to defend themselves forcefully, quite unlike

- 181 the Bantus, who are staunch and brave and in the past have waged great wars. But Bushmen deplore and misunderstand bravery. The heroes of their legends are always little jackals who trick, lie, and narrowly escape, rather than larger, bolder [538] animals such as lions (who in the Kalahari are something of a master race). In the Bushmen's stories, lions are always being scalded, singed, duped, cuckolded, or killed.

181 Bushmen cannot afford to fight with each other and almost
 182 never do because their only real weapon is their arrow poison,
 578 for which there is no antidote. But even were they to disre-
 422 gard this danger, Bushmen would try not to fight because they have no mechanism in their culture for dealing with disagreements other than to remove the causes of the disagreements. Their hold on life is too tenuous to permit quarreling among themselves. A Bushman will go to any lengths to avoid making other Bushmen jealous of him, and for this reason the few possessions that Bushmen have are constantly circling among the members of their groups. No one cares to keep a particularly good knife too long, even though he may want it desperately, because he will become the object of envy; as he sits by himself polishing a fine edge on the blade he will hear the soft voices of the other men in his band saying: "Look at him there, admiring his knife while we have nothing." Soon somebody will ask him for his knife, for everybody would like to have it, and he will give it away. Their culture insists that they share with each other, and it has never happened that a Bushman failed to share objects, food, or water with the other members of his band, for without very rigid co-operation Bushmen could not survive the famines and droughts that the Kalahari offers them.

181 The other reason for their submissiveness is that Bushmen,
 609 whose possessions are only sticks and bones, beads made of eggshell and fragments of leather, are overwhelmed by the

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possessions of Bantus and Europeans—horses and cattle, 181
 dogs, melon lands, medicines, rifles, boots, and trucks—as 609
 well as their enormous size, heavy necks and arms, great
 beards, and roaring voices. Europeans are beyond the powers
 of Bushmen's imagination, more awesome in stature, in pos-
 sessions, in might, than even the Bushmen's god, who can be [776]
 cajoled, who hunts with a bow and arrow. Bushmen consider
 the Europeans and the Bantus to be superior beings. Bantus [48]
 and Europeans consider the Bushmen to be inferior beings,
 and, without resisting, a Bushman always bows to a Euro-
 pean or a Bantu person's will.

Once an old man, a veld Bushman, told us the story of the 283
 reim and the grass fiber. A reim is a leather rope which the 539
 Bantus make by skinning a cow with a long, spiraling cut that
 goes around and around the body so that the hide comes off
 all in one piece a few inches wide and many yards long, which
 is then stretched and cured, making a piece of leather useful
 for harnessing oxen or building a hut.

"In the earliest days," the old man said, "the Bushmen and 539
 the non-Bushmen were all one nation, and the great god 773
 came to earth and gave them a rope. Half the rope was made
 of reim and half was made of grass fiber. The great god told
 all the people to pull on the rope, and the non-Bushmen came
 away with the reim, but the Bushmen got only the grass fiber.
 After that, the non-Bushmen had cattle and reims and all
 those things, but the Bushmen had only the things that are
 in the veld. If this ever happened again," the old man said,
 "I would tell the Bushmen to make sure they got the reim
 half."

So the distinction between people was caused by the great 181
 god, and the Bushmen, who want only to be left in peace, do 609
 not compete in issues which they cannot win. They are only [773]
 frightened by other peoples and hope to be spared their atten-

- 131 tion. Kung Bushmen call all strangers *zhu dole*, which means
609 "stranger" but, literally, "dangerous person"; they call all
non-Bushmen *zo si*, which means "animals without hooves,"
because, they say, non-Bushmen are angry and dangerous
like lions and hyenas. But Kung Bushmen call themselves
zhu twa si, the harmless people. *Twa* means "just" or "only,"
in the sense that you say: "It was just the wind" or "It is
only me."

481 well as great loads of melons, all of which we offered again
482 and again to carry for them, but because, they said, they
might want to stop for the night or just refresh themselves
along the way, they would not part with their bundles.

The place we went to was called Ai a ha'o; it was the pan
where we had seen the lion. It took us almost all day to
drive there, and shortly after we arrived Dasina and Kutura
joined us, having traveled almost as fast as we. Those two old
women must have walked at four or five miles an hour all
the way, over veld so rough that the trucks couldn't go much
faster.

342 Before dark, the Bushman women had built a werf, a clear-
361 ing of grass for each family with a shallow pit to sleep in and
a place for the fire, all four clearings under the branches of a
353 single tree which would give them shade in the daytime. On
the branches each person hung whatever there was to hang,
quivers, skin bags, or aprons, and these things swung in the
cold wind. The women gathered firewood and lit their fires,
757 and Dasina asked Twikwe to stand on her stomach because
562 she was tired from her long walk and wanted a massage. Be-
574 fore they went to sleep the men and the three young boys
577 walked to our camp, about fifty feet away, to say good-night,
but the women stayed at home because at night all Bushmen
women stay at home. A woman does not even leave her fire
to go to her neighbor's fire three feet away because people will
say that she doesn't like to stay home; she speaks loudly to
her neighbor instead. Bushmen are a rather conservative peo-
ple, and they are very moral in that they keep their own rules.

574 The smoke in the west that Gai had seen when he roasted
the tortoise intrigued him very much. Again and again he
said that it was people's smoke, and one morning he said he
wanted to go over to it, to look for the man who was Wita-

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[18]

In such disturbed times, the Bushmen fare ill. They are not, and probably were not ever, a warlike people. Their society is not constructed for war, their culture dampens war. Yet, now, wars and battles began to scatter across the land, as groups of people—large and small, Bantu armies, itinerant raiders, the remnants of tiny nations and the dispossessed—marched and wandered in their search of conquest or safe distant places.

Some Bushmen nations were driven into pockets in the hills, where they died slowly. Some stayed on their land and were decimated and made slaves. Some resisted and, as one who spoke of his people told me: "We were soldiers in those days." Their armies changed into marauder bands that sometimes fought and often ran. Of these, the Heikum were an example—an embittered, scattered nation of travelers on the then uncertain grasslands of South West Africa. When, at

[p.29]

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THE !KUNG BUSHMEN OF THE KALAHARI DESERT

about the chapter

For the anthropologist, the Bushmen are one of the world's most ¹⁰¹ intriguing peoples, as they are virtually unique physically, linguistically, and culturally. The physical anthropologist cannot place the Bushmen ¹⁴⁴ in any one of the recognized major racial groupings: Caucasoid, Mongoloid, or Negroid. Similarly, linguists have placed their language ¹⁹⁷ in a category, Khoisan, apart from other African language families. The velar "clicks" that characterize Khoisan languages are apparently found nowhere in the world outside of Africa.

The culture of the Bushmen shows the imprint of their harsh and ¹⁸² barren desert habitat, and, as Marshall points out, the ethos of their ¹⁸⁷ culture is dominated by the quest for survival. Many Bushman cultural institutions are molded by certain ecological constants: water, the location of water holes, water-storing plants, and other edible wild plants, the movements of game. The size of the band, the daily cycle of labor, the low incidence of polygyny, are all aspects of culture marked in this way. Certain other Bushman institutions, however, are not simply cultural creations passively molded by habitat; rather, they give the Bushmen better than even odds to defy the limitations which their habitat imposes. Such culture patterns are their skillful hunting techniques, their institutionalized patterns of sharing, and their strong striving for cooperation and harmony. Few cultures give the observer such a rich opportunity to study the two-way interaction between habitat and culture.

LORNA MARSHALL

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square miles, centered approximately at Gautscha (about 19°48'30" S, 181°20'34'36" E). The region lies for the most part in South West Africa, but extends into the Bechuanaland Protectorate to a number of Tswana and Herero settlements along the border. We arbitrarily call this particular stretch of country a region because it is a region in the minds of the Bushmen. In it are some 27 bands living independently in their own traditional way and 9 groups employed by the Tswana and Herero—a !Kung population of about 1000. These !Kung intermarry. They have not formally structured the region as an endogamous unit, but they remain within it by custom and preference. They know there are other !Kung-speakers living to the north and northwest of them, but consider them strangers, as they do the Auen-speaking and Naron-speaking Bushmen to the south.

ECONOMY

It is vividly apparent that among the !Kung Bushmen, ethos, or "the spirit which actuates manners and customs," is survival. Their time and energies are almost wholly given to this task, for life in their environment requires that they spend their days mainly in procuring food. The band organization is important to their survival, and, to secure the mutual support and companionship that it affords, they seek to regulate their social actions to reduce tension and potential hostility among the individuals within the band. They also strive to avoid the possibility of conflict between bands. Similarly, in their religious concepts and practices, the emphasis is on survival in this life on earth, not a looking forward to the eternal life in the sky after death.

WILD PLANT FOODS (veldkos) • The !Kung of the Nyae Nyae region have no agriculture. They subsist mainly on wild plant foods, which we refer to by the convenient Afrikaans word *veldkos*. The game the hunters of a band manage to kill is an important part of their diet and much desired, but it is by no means the daily sustenance. In this region the !Kung know more than a hundred different kinds of *veldkos* (cf. Story 1958). Several species of berries exist, dry and hard for the most part. A few fruits ripen suddenly in a short season. Leaves, resembling spinach, make a spring salad for a short time. Morsels of gums from certain trees are cherished like sweets. Tsama melons and wild cucumbers grow here but do not abound in this region as they do in some other parts of the Kalahari where some Bushman groups can live on them for certain seasons without having access to any water. Most important to the daily sustenance of the Nyae Nyae !Kung are the edible underground roots, tubers, and storage organs of certain drought-resistant plants. We observed the gathering of 23 different kinds of these; doubtless there are more. In addition to the roots and tubers, there are sev-

224 they are present, and to other kin, affines, and friends who are there, possibly
602 only in small quantities by then.

Everyone who receives meat gives again, in another wave of sharing, to his or her parents, parents-in-law, spouses, offspring, siblings, and others.

[57] This meat may be cooked and the quantities small. Visitors receive small amounts of cooked meat from their hosts. It ends in everybody getting some meat.

224 In the later waves of sharing, when the primary distribution and pri-
431 mary kinship obligations have been fulfilled, the giving of meat from one's own portion has the quality of gift giving. !Kung society requires at this point only that a person should give with reasonable generosity in proportion to what he has received and not keep more than an equitable amount for himself, and that the person who receives a gift of meat must give a reciprocal gift of meat at some time in the future. People give to whom they please, this time to some, next time to others, more generously or less generously

[57] according to their own (to us often unfathomable) reasons. We are certain, however, that the motives are the same as in gift giving in general: the person gives to measure up to what is expected of him, to make friendly gestures, to win favor, to repay past favors and obligations, and to enmesh others in future obligation.

224 Aside from the practical advantage of using up meat while it is still
431 fresh, the !Kung custom of meat sharing has enormous social value. It does
181 a great deal to mitigate tensions. The fear of hunger is lessened. People are

[54] sustained by a web of mutual obligation. Moreover, they are fully conscious
[1A] of these values, and the custom is so strongly established and so faithfully followed that the idea of not sharing is virtually unthinkable to the !Kung.

422 Meat is not habitually cooked and eaten as a family meal among the
262 !Kung. When an individual receives a portion he owns it outright. He may
264 give and share it further, as he wishes, but it never becomes family or group property. The men, women, and children may cook their pieces when and as they wish, often roasting bits in the coals and hot ashes and eating them alone at odd times. Or someone may start a big pot boiling and several people will bring their pieces to put into it at the same time, each taking his own piece out when it is cooked.

[261] The sense of possessing one's own piece personally is, I believe, very important to the !Kung. It gives one the responsibility of choosing when to eat one's meat and struggling with hunger as best one can when it is finished, without occasion or excuse for blaming others for eating more than their share.

224 It has often been reported that, when Bushmen kill an animal, they
261 gorge themselves until they can hardly walk. We have seen the Nyac Nyac !Kung eat hearty meals of meat when plenty appeared and they had been long without, but nothing more than we considered a normal amount.

776 gods, the !Kung fear to do so because it displeases the gods and draws their attention and they say, "Who is calling my name?"

[77] The lesser god who lives in the western sky is the namesake of the great god, who, as the belief goes, gave the lesser god all seven of his own divine names, but not his human name. Although they insist in this belief, the !Kung never used any name but //Gauwa, one of the seven divine names, when they referred to the lesser god and we never heard them actually use this name for the great god. It would seem, then, that the lesser god is the old evil spirit, //Gauwa, who appears in the beliefs of the Hottentots and other Bushman language groups as the destroyer and the black chief, the one who sends death, disease, and misfortune. This evil spirit was an entity distinct from the good spirit who was variously named by Bushman groups *Hishe*, *Huwe*, and so on.

In present !Kung belief, however, neither the great god nor the lesser god is all evil or all good. Both are capable of being pleased or displeased with man and of sending favors or misfortunes. The lesser god is subservient to the great god and is supposed to do his bidding. The lesser god, however, has his own entity and does instigate his own actions, sometimes even disobeying the great god. Often they disagree between themselves.

[78] The great god looks like a man, like a Bushman, but he is "the tallest of the Bushmen" and has long black hair that is not twisted and knotted like Bushman hair. He rides a horse across the sky—you can hear him—and he has a gun as well as bows and arrows. Some say he never comes to earth but always sends //Gauwa, or the spirits of the dead, the //gauwasi, to bring the good or evil that he sends to men. Only the greatest of medicine men have ever seen him.

//Gauwa, however, is commonly seen by the medicine men. They describe him as small. One said he was about two feet tall; another, that he was as small as a guinea fowl; a third, that he was as small as a mouse. Several agreed that he was covered with yellow hairs. One, however, a humble man, said that while in trance he had seen //Gauwa and that he was like a gray mist.

782 RELIGIOUS PRACTICES • The !Kung say that they pray spontaneously to the gods. Whenever the thought comes to them they put their prayers into words and say or think them to themselves without any formality. When they speak in prayer to the great god they address him by the respectful term *!Nai*, used for any old man, or use a title *Gaoxa* (chief), or call him "father." Sometimes they use one of his names. The prayers, a mingling of mild imprecation and pleading, reveal the major concerns of the !Kung: hunger, sickness, and death.¹¹

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755 The great god, responsible for sending sickness and death to men, also created and gives to men a mystical curing power that is called *gaosa*